

**Master Gardeners of Nevada County**  
**Houseplant Workshop**  
**June 25, 2022**  
**Dawn Bateman & Sylvia Wright**



*We've rated these plants as easy/medium/difficult here in Nevada County, based on our own experience and recommended care instructions. There will ALWAYS be someone who says something like "Oh, my orchids flower all the time – they're easy." Our guess is dumb luck. Sigh....*

*Also: If your home has pets or children, please note that not all the plants on this list are appropriate, as some are potentially toxic if ingested or may cause a rash. These include snake plant, dumb cane, peace lily, pothos, and the rubber plant. Research every plant before buying.*

**Easy to grow:** Survives in many growing conditions, requires little if any special care.  
Directions below are for ideal situations.

**Chinese Evergreen** *Aglaonema commutatum*: Many colorful varieties, dark green to red. Beautiful foliage, lance shaped leaves. Medium to low light. Forgiving about inconsistent watering.

**Dieffenbachia** *Dieffenbachia* : Sometimes known as Dumb Cane. Large oval shape leaves come in many types of variegations and colors. Upright growth habit and can grow quickly. Most are 2 to 3 feet tall, but can grow as high as 5 feet. Don't like to dry out but biggest mistake is overwatering.

**Dragon Tree** *Dracaena Marginata*: Grows on a single stalk with long sword-like leaves that have narrow purple, red or gold margins. Often several stalks are included in one pot. Prefers bright, indirect light but will tolerate dimmer light conditions. Regular watering. Can grow to 20 feet in the right conditions! Repotting necessary as the plant grows taller.

**Snake Plant** *Sansevieria trifasciata* : Grows in almost any light condition, although will grow faster the brighter the light. Drought resistant. Don't overwater. Regular potting mix. Can grow very large 1 to 8 feet tall and up to 3 feet wide.

**Philodendron** *Philodendron hederaceum oxycardium*: Glossy heart shaped leaves come in a variety of colors and variegations. Some are bushy, some vining. Will tolerate most lighting conditions including fluorescent. Regular potting mix, occasional feeding.

**ZZ Plant** *Zamioculcas zamiifolia*: Lush and leafy with bright green polished looking foliage. Tough, easy to care for. Rarely, you can kill it with overwatering. Can reach 2 to 3 feet tall. Leaflets 3 to 5 inches.

**Spider Plant** *Chlorophytum comosum* : Great beginner plant, not fussy about soil, water, light, fertilizer. Direct sun will burn the leaves. Produce rosettes of long, sword like foliage sometimes with variegation. Will create long stems with "baby" plants that are easily transplanted for more spider plants! Look very nice in hanging baskets.

**Corn plant**: *Dracaena deremensis*: Unbranched, tree like plant on thick stalk. Leaves can grow to 2 feet long with a yellow stripe down the middle. Plant grows upright, adding leaves to make it taller and taller. No direct sunlight. Will live for years and grow up to 8+ feet tall.

**Pothos** *Epipremnum aureum*: Native to the island Mo'orea in Tahiti. Thrives in almost any environment. Heart shaped glossy or satiny leaves. Vining. Several leaf variegations and colors. Likes to dry out between waterings. Looks great in hanging pot.

**Cast Iron Plant** *Aspidistra elatior*: Seems to thrive on neglect. Will grow in many conditions, even outdoors in warmer but not tropical climates. Long stiff pointed evergreen leaves sometimes with spotting or striping. Prefers low light but not particularly fussy.

**Arrowhead Plant** *Syngonium podophyllum*: Variegated arrow shaped leaves. Many varieties. Tolerate very low light. Vining as it gets older - tendrils can climb or prune to size. Average water, regular potting soil,

**Hoya** *Hoya carnosa*: Also called wax plant. Vining. Some varieties have green, white or pink colored leaves. Prefers bright, indirect light but will tolerate less. very forgiving, doesn't need any special care. Will produce fragrant flowers under perfect conditions but is beautiful on its own. Doesn't like to be overwatered.

**Schefflera** *Schefflera actinophylla*: Umbrella plant. Some have variegated leaves. Moderate light, allow soil to dry out before watering. May get leggy without enough sun but can easily prune it back.

**Parlor Palm** *Chamaedorea elegans*: Pretty, Multi stemmed with graceful sword leaf fronds. Will tolerate light with average water but grows faster in brighter conditions, May need a little humidity in very dry conditions. Don't overwater.

## **Medium Difficulty:** Requires some special care or conditions but readily accomplished in a home environment

**Rubber Tree** *Ficus elastica*: Large, shiny oval leaves on a single stalk. Can get very tall and need staking. Ample sun light but never direct as leaves will scorch. periodic feeding, regularly moist but not soggy soil. Can grow very tall 10+ feet indoors.

**Most Ivies:** Common varieties are Grape ivy *Cissus rhombifolia* and English ivy *Hedera helix*. Best in bright but not direct sun, well drained soil. Like a cooler environment. Water thoroughly then allow to dry out somewhat.

**Norfolk Island Pine** *Araucaria heterophylla*: Sometimes sold as Christmas trees during the holidays. The tree has fronds that resemble pine trees but it is not a true pine and must be grown indoors in the US. Other than no direct sun, it is forgiving of most living situations. Prefers some humidity so grow on top of a tray with rocks and water.

**Christmas Cactus:** segmented hanging foliage with bright flowers around fall/winter holiday time. Will flower better if given East facing light. Keep soil moist, but is forgiving of inconsistent watering. Can bloom multiple times if follow a light/dark procedure but are attractive enough without the foliage.

**Peperomia** *Peperomia*: Waxy, colorful foliage. Numerous varieties. Grow in orchid medium. Very forgiving of care can dry out with no problems. Medium to bright light. Fertilizer not necessary.

**African Violet** *Saintpaulia*: Fuzzy leaves with bouquets of colorful flowers several times a year. Need east facing light (best). Keep warm. Never let water touch their leaves. Remove spent flowers for continual bloom. Well drained potting mix, keep moist but not wet as are subject to root rot. Do not dry out. Fertilize regularly for better blooms. Divide when plant put out side "plantlets"

**Prayer Plant** *Calathea concinna* Decorative, often tri-colored flat leaves fold up in the evening, hence the name. Low growing, spreading habit, to 12" tall. Indirect light, north face ideal. Requires well drained soil. Do not let it dry out. Fertilize regularly. Will not tolerate temps lower than 60 degrees.

**Peace lily** *Spathiphyllum* Attractive glossy elongated oval leaves in a bushy habit. Produces long white flower spikes in Spring. Regular water, allow to dry out but not wilt between waterings. Grows well in low light but will grow faster in filtered light. Will burn and may die in bright light.

**Flamingo Flower** *Anthurium* Waxy dark green heart shaped foliage. Produces beautiful tropical red or yellow flower spikes several times a year. Upright growth habit. Bright indirect light, regular watering.

**Succulents** Popular belief is that these plants require no care – Not So! Numerous varieties with individual needs. Desert cacti, jade plants, aloe, agave and sedums prefer direct sunlight and low water. Overwatering causes the most casualties but they do need occasional watering. Need to use a succulent potting soil designed to not retain much moisture.

**Ponytail Palm** *Beaucarnea recurvata* Long, wavy fronds grow from a bulbous trunk, sometimes called an “elephant’s foot.” Grows best in potting soil for succulents. Bright light, direct sun ok. Water every 7 to 14 days. Do not overwater as trunk stores much moisture. Likes dry, arid conditions. Very slow growing, seldom needs repotting. Not a true palm – is a member of the asparagus family.

**Asparagus Fern** *Asparagus setaceus*: Not really a fern, is a relative of the asparagus plant. Feathery, fern like leaves. Small white flowers turn to purple berries. Indirect light, moist soil, no soggy feet. Keep a mist bottle nearby and spray the fronds regularly. Can be grown outdoors in pots in Zone 9 or higher but must keep moist in dappled shade lighting.

**Chinese Money Plant/UFO Plant/Pancake Plant** *Pilea peperomioides* Native to China along the base of the Himalayan Mountains. Green coin shaped foliage. Bright indirect light, allow to dry out between waterings, healthy potting soil. Will fill the pot with offshoots to create a thicker plant. Easily propagated to share with friends, AKA Friendship Plant.

**Money Tree** *Pachira aquatica* Sold as smaller plants with braided trunks. Bright light but not direct sun. Regular watering but do not allow to become soggy. Can grow up to 24” per year, so regular repotting is necessary. In Feng Shui, these plant are believed to create positive “chi”

**More gardening information: [NCMG.ucanr.org](http://NCMG.ucanr.org)**

**Difficult to grow:** Typical issues are fussiness about growing conditions, humidity needs, typically tropical, or needing extensive care.

**Fiddle leaf fig** *ficus lyrata*: Native to Western and Central Africa. Requires full sun, high humidity, moist soil at all times. Notoriously fussy. Architecturally interesting.

**Orchid** *Orchidaceae*: Native to tropical rain forests in Central America and other areas. Successful indoor growing requires replication of their native environments. Needs specialized growing medium, careful watering methods, weekly weak feedings, north facing light. Misting in winter.

**Ferns:**

**Bird's Nest Fern** *Asplenium nidus*: Native to tropical SE Asia, Australia, Hawaii. Large ruffled dark green fronds that can grow quite large. Needs porous, well drained potting soil or will easily get root rot. No bright sunlight but not in shade. Best in Northern Exposure. Ideal temps between 60 to 70 degrees. Doesn't like high heat or dry air.

**Boston Fern** *Nephrolepis exaltata*: Native to humid forests of South America and Mexico. AKA Sword Fern. Lush and leafy with long arching fronds. Needs bright, indirect sunlight, warm temperatures, high humidity or fronds will brown and die Regular moisture.

**Maidenhair Fern** *Adiantum raddianum*:- North American humid forests. Prized for their fine textured fronds. To grow indoors require sun but never direct and never too shady, high humidity, soil may not dry out but may not be soggy either.

**Air plants** *tillandsia* : epiphytes. No direct sun, high humidity. Best way to water is through weekly submersion for 30 minutes or daily spraying

**Kalanchoe** *Kalanchoe blossfeldiana* : Native to Madagascar. Succulent with very colorful flower and dark green foliage. Frequently sold in supermarkets as gift plants. Easy to keep through blooming time but to bloom again will require tricking it into a winter cycle with 12 hours of darkness and cool temperatures. Requires plenty of bright, indirect sunlight. Well drained, sandy soil. Low humidity. Monthly feedings.

**Begonias** *Begonia*: Slightly too much water? Root rot. Slightly too little water: Crispy leaves. Same for too high or too low humidity. And sometimes the thing just starts dying for reasons unknown...

**Poinsettia** *Euphorbia pulcherrima* : Need direct sunlight but not high heat (max. 70 degrees), soil must remain moist but never soggy, use an elaborate process over several months to get

them to rebloom, unless of course you live in a tropical climate. In that environment, you can just plant it outside.

**Caladium/Elephant Ears** *caladium*: Native to South and Central America. Grow on banks of rivers and go dormant during dry seasons. Large heart-shaped leaves in a variety of colors. Without year-round high humidity, they die back. Constant even moisture, bright light but no direct sun.

**Cheese Plant** *Monstera deliciosa*: Large leaves are architecturally interesting with their deeply serrated leaves or large holes. Finding the right light conditions for this plant can be very difficult. It is recommended that their leaves be washed every 1 - 2 weeks. Leaves can cause skin irritation.

**Weeping Fig** *Ficus benjamina*: Native to Southeast Asia and Australia. Elegant arching branches with dense glossy dark green leaves. Needs bright, indirect light. Regularly scheduled watering but allow to dry out between waterings during winter months. Will drop leaves if over watered or underwatered. Prefer high humidity, low humidity will cause leaf drop. Heavy feeders requiring regular fertilization. Well-known allergen.

**Goldfish Plant** *Columnea gloriosa* Multi-colored plant with long trailing vines. Produces orange goldfish shaped flowers. Requires bright direct light. Thoroughly saturate soil and allow excess to drain out. Then allow to dry out a bit before watering again. Feed 2 – 3 times a year. Pinch off growing tips weekly to encourage branching. Prefers humid environment. Native to Central America.

**Croton** *Codiaeum variegatum* Large flat leaves of a variety of colors and patterns. Grows in an upright manner. Can be difficult to grow because of their sensitivity to temperature fluctuations, temps no lower than 70 degrees or it will start to drop its leaves. Prefers dappled light and regular watering.

**Bromeliads** *Bromeliaceae* Glossy green sword type leaves available in a variety of colors. Under ideal conditions related to day length, temperature, water, humidity and feeding will produce a showy flower. Needs are determined by variety. Can water through the soil or the center of the plant. A nice gift plant for a single showing.

**Outdoor plants as indoor plants:** Miniature Roses, Azaleas, Hydrangeas, Gardenias. It is almost impossible to replicate the seasonable outdoor growing conditions they require. They are typically not successfully transplanted the outdoors. They are overfed to bloom profusely, grown in greenhouses, not nursery conditions.